

Christmas 1970

Dear Friends,

This year, Karl has appointed me to write the Christmas letter as he has been very busy. He has a new project which you will hear about shortly.

The BIG NEWS of the year is that both Karl and I will be laid off our jobs on 31 December. The Minuteman program, on which we have been employed for several years, is being transferred to California and the entire office here is being closed. Although Karl and I both could have transferred to California with the company, we declined to do so. With all the layoffs that have taken place here from both the military programs and the Apollo space program, it seemed unlikely that either of us could find jobs in missile engineering and testing. So, after careful thought, we decided to open a retail store specializing in canoes and camping equipment. Consequently, Karl has been very busy, contacting distributors, leasing a store, and doing all the things necessary to open a business sometime in February. I will be an assistant shopkeeper and chief bookkeeper. We realize that this is not the best time to start a new business, with the whole economy being somewhat depressed, but we felt we did not have much choice about the timing. It is our goal to just break even the first year while we gain experience in this new venture, and then hope the business climate will be much improved the following year.

We are both still very much involved in conservation activities. As you may recall from our last letter, our Audubon chapter hosted the State Convention in February in Cocoa Beach. It was a success, both financially and otherwise. Because of the current interest in pollution and other conservation issues, Karl has been called upon to make talks to various groups in the county, such as high schools and colleges on "ecology days", Kiwanis groups, women's clubs, etc. He has also been appointed to various boards by the County Commission as the conservation representative.

We did find time to do a little traveling and camping this year, plus a great deal of canoeing. Last December we spent a few days in Everglades National Park, after attending my sister's wedding in Homestead. We also camped in June at Fort Clinch State Park, and we just returned from the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge where we again spent the Thanksgiving holidays. This time both of us canoed twenty miles across the Swamp.

We had two summer projects. One, sponsored by our Audubon chapter, was to inventory the alligator population on the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and to observe alligator nesting. So a group of us spent many evenings in our canoes wearing headlamps and counting pairs of large red eyes, and then trying to get close enough to see how long each alligator was. We estimated that 3000 alligators live on the refuge. However, we never found a nest, either from the canoes or from the air via airplanes.

The second project was to find, identify, and photograph various plants and animals in the county with the idea of preparing illustrated talks describing the botanical areas of the county and the wildlife which inhabits them. We have a wide variety of habitat here, ocean dunes, mangrove shorelines, sand pine dunes, pine flatwoods, fresh water ponds and rivers, hardwood and cypress swamps, etc. It was a fun project and I enjoyed identifying the many wildflowers that bloom in the area. Karl did most of the photography while a friend of ours provided much of the botanical background and research assistance we needed.

All in all, it has been a busy, but enjoyable, year and we now look forward to another year with new and unknown challenges. We earnestly hope that it will be a good year, not only for our own new venture, but for the endeavors of all our friends and relatives.

Sincere Best Wishes,

Betty and Karl Eichhorn

Cocoa Beach, FL
Christmas 1992

Holiday Greetings to All:

Most of our neighbors have been stringing their outside lights, so it must be that time of year again! Except for the usual Florida summer doldrums, it has been a fairly busy year for us. I spent early January cleaning and polishing my '65 Corvette for a show at Cypress Gardens the end of the month. I had hoped to get a blue ribbon this year, but, alas, it was a red one again - I missed Top Flight by one point out of 100. We spent the week-end with our old friends from Minuteman days, the Houstons, so it was a very nice week-end anyway. We also went to a camera show at Largo in early February, but it was a disaster - I didn't even sell enough to pay for gasoline!

During the spring we went on a couple Audubon camping/birding trips and attended the antique shows at Mt. Dora. I went to a couple meetings of the Antique Outboard Motor Club, which I joined a couple years ago, and in between activities did some major repair work on our ancient '70 YW Bus. Betty's Garden Club had a plant sale in March and she also went on a couple other Audubon birding trips which I skipped while repairing the Bus. One interesting trip we took was one day to Zolfo Springs in early March where the Florida Flywheelers were exhibiting all their old gasoline and steam engines. Hundreds of these things were put-putting all over the place - fascinating! My sister, Barbara, and Tom came down from Ohio to visit with us in early April for a very enjoyable week. After they left I spent about a week doing maintenance on our '87 Chevy Van in preparation for our planned western vacation.

A good friend of Betty's agreed to feed our pussy-cat and care for the swimming pool, so after loading the Van we cranked it up on 7 May and headed northwest. We stopped at the Air Force Armament Museum in west Florida on the way, then we chugged on towards northwest Texas, going through Amarillo and on into New Mexico. Our first major stops were Chaco Canyon (If there is a worse road in the world than that one, I don't ever want to drive it!!), Canyon de Chelly and on to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. There, even this early in the season, it was so crowded we had to wait in line for a campsite. I'd hate to go there in mid-summer! We were astounded by the air pollution in the Canyon and the general four-corners area. We are rapidly ruining this beautiful country! Our visit there was dampened by rain a couple days which also sort of spoiled a brief visit to Zion Nat'l. Park. We next headed north in Utah for a quick visit with my niece Lesley and Jim, then on to Grand Teton where we spent a delightful week. This is Betty's favorite place in the West. While there we visited with our good friend Helen Cruickshank, who was staying at Jackson. We had celebrated her 90th birthday in February! What a gal! From the Tetons we headed west again, into Idaho. We visited Craters of the Moon (what a weird place!) then gradually on north almost to the Canadian border. We spent a week in Idaho and really loved the place. The Sawtooth Nat'l. Recreation Area, though operated by the Forest Service, was much like a National Park, with numerous lovely campgrounds. *Since have* From boyhood I had read about the spectacular fishing spots in Idaho - the Salmon and Clearwater Rivers, Lakes Coeur d'Alene and Pend Oreille and now was my chance to latch on to some of those huge trout and Salmon. I bought a ten-day license with high expectations, but if there really are big fish in Idaho, they are still happily swimming around, having avoided my lures completely!

After leaving Priest Lake we reluctantly turned the Van east, crossed the "Going-to-the-Sun" Road over Glacier Park and on through Montana, with a visit to Bowdoin Nat'l. Wildlife Refuge, and after several more long days on the road arrived home on 16 June. After the usual unloading and storing away our camping gear, I spent a couple weeks doing major maintenance on the van after 9000 miles on the road.

The latter part of August brought excitement and worry as Hurricane Andrew headed straight for Cocoa Beach. We spent all day Saturday, the 22nd, packing two vehicles with the things we wanted to save (it is a terrible thing to have to decide which few things, accumulated over a lifetime, you will try to save, leaving the rest to be lost). They told us we would have to evacuate the Beach between 0900 and 1200 on Sunday, but fortunately for us, during the night the storm made a sharp turn to the west and headed straight as an arrow for south Florida. Naturally, we were relieved but our sympathies went to those folks farther south who lost everything, knowing it could easily have been us! Betty caught the gardening fever early this year and in the heat of late August was out every morning digging up and mulching her garden. While we have enjoyed several vegetables, a variety of crawling critters enjoyed it even more, decimating a number of her squash, beans and tomatoes. The Garden Club kept Betty busy also, with another big plant sale in October.

As usual it was a hot, miserable summer here and it lasted unusually long-right up to the end of November. The only consolation was that we could swim well into November. But now that cooler weather has finally arrived we look forward to some long-awaited outdoor activity in the months ahead. We wish you all a happy holiday season and offer our best wishes for a great year of 1993!

Christmas 1998

Greetings to all of our friends & relatives:

Last year I tried to "gussie-up" our Christmas letter on the computer but this year I'm so far behind that a "simpleminded" format is all I have time for. Thanks to El Nino, La Nina and, no doubt, Flying Saucers, this has been a strange year in Florida. First we had a very wet winter, which flooded many areas, then a couple devastating tornadoes, followed by a four month drought, which led to violent wildfires in May and June and now temperatures in the 80's, much above normal. The woods fires were mostly well to the north of us but the smoke was pretty bad here for two or three weeks. You may be enjoying the milder than normal weather "up noath" but here we are still enduring the hottest summer & fall I can remember. We also sweated out a couple hurricanes during the late summer, but fortunately each one passed us by.

Our activity year started with a mid-February one-week trip to the FL west coast where we visited Sanibel Island and Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge, Corkscrew Swamp, Marco Island and attended a meeting of the Antique Outboard Motor Club to which I belong. In early April we went on a camping trip to Okefenokee Swamp with a small group of Audubon friends. We did a bit of bird & wildflower watching and took a nice boat trip into the swamp.

Our BIG adventure of the year began in mid-May. For years we have talked about visiting the Maritime Provinces of Canada (They call it Atlantic Canada now), and finally this year we decided to do it while we are both in good health. On the way north Betty visited with a couple of her relatives near Saugerties, NY, seeking family information, then we spent a couple days with our old friends the Fitzroys in Schenectady. Next was a visit with friends from Minuteman days, John and Lorraine Gray in Newagon, Maine. John retired from working on rockets to snatching lobsters from the sea abutting their home. A unique day on his lobster boat brought in eight keepers and they treated us to a wonderful lobster dinner - the culinary highlight of our trip. Resuming our trip, we visited Roosevelt's retreat on Campobello Island, before continuing up the western edge of New Brunswick. The highlights of that Province were its two wonderful National Parks - Kouchibouguac (Try to pronounce that!) and Fundy. The tides at Fundy must be seen to be believed!! Crossing into Nova Scotia we headed for Cape Breton Island and another wonderful National Park (every Canadian National Park we visited was superb!) There we met friends from Melbourne Beach, the Nicolays, who were also on vacation. We traveled with them for nearly two weeks and we had a great time. We both took the five-hour ferry from North Sydney to Port aux Basques, NFLD on 3 June. In planning the trip at home I had expected to get into the north central area of NFLD, but it never happened. Newfoundland is BIG, the roads are not the best and in the end we only managed to visit the western edge of the Province. We loved NFLD and would like to return and see it all. And the residents -the "Newfies"- are just wonderful people who will do anything to help visitors. In fact ALL the Canadians we met were helpful, friendly and just great folks who fly their flag proudly from most of their homes, even modest fishermen's residences. We returned home via the east coast of Nova Scotia and took the high speed catamaran from Yarmouth to Bar Harbor. The only bad part of the trip was the very poor weather -cloudy and rainy much of the time - lousy for photography. We went to Acadia Nat'l. Park but were fogged out of there and after a long, hard drive reached home on 19 June. A really memorable vacation!

This summer my sister/B in L, Barb and Tom, and my niece Sandy's family moved from Ohio to the Ft. Lauderdale area, so we are now close enough to visit more often. Mid-September saw us drive to Atlanta for the reunion of my WW II Bomb Group. A good turnout after all these years - nearly 400, including our faithful-five from the 726th Armament Section. It is always great to see old comrades again and we all hope to make it again in 2000.

Fortunately we both remain well, including "Happy Herman" our lazy black pussy-cat. Betty's mini-garden has been producing broccoli, with tomatoes, onions and turnips to follow shortly.

We wish you all Happy Holidays,

Bud & Betty



911 Bah Road
Cocoa Beach, FL 32931
Christmas 1987



Dear Relatives & Friends

I guess when you're retired the only believable excuse for being late with Christmas cards is simple procrastination! So be it. Following the usual Christmas Bird Counts, we started this year with a couple enjoyable hikes on local sections of the Florida Trail, which is now part of the National Scenic Trail system. I spent part of January cleaning and preparing my '65 Corvette for entry in the National Corvette Restorers Society regional meeting at Cypress Gardens, which was held the week-end of 22-24 January. This was the first time I had entered the car in any competition, so I didn't know what to expect. We stayed with the Houstons, friends from our Minuteman days, at their home in Winter Haven. It was an interesting week-end and the car judging was very comprehensive. I thought my car was in great shape, but my final score was 91.5 points, of a possible 100, which won a red ribbon - missed the blue by 2.5 points! Oh well, it was fun anyway.

I went to a couple camera shows in February, once as a dealer, and also took Betty to several antique and depression glass shows early in the year. On 2 March our new Chevy Van, which we had ordered in November, arrived and I began what turned out to be a job of over four months to convert it for camping and vacation trips. It arrived as a completely bare panel van without even front seats! I finally finished the work about the middle of July, with interruptions for a couple trips, and just in time to avoid the worst of the summer heat. We now have a solid, carpeted plywood floor, plenty of storage cabinets, a small double sink with fresh and waste water storage, a small clothes closet and an upholstered sofa which converts to a bed. All the plywood is covered with Formica and it looks and functions to our highest expectations. We still have our old YW Bus which serves us faithfully for garage sales, flea markets and local errands, but with nearly a quarter-million miles on the odometer it is now just too tired for long trips. With us, it is in honorable retirement!

We took our first trip in the new van four days after it arrived - to St. Marvs, GA, where we joined a group of friends for a hiking-camping trip to Cumberland Island National Seashore. In spite of steady rain all day Saturday and during the night, it was an interesting and fun trip - I think. The end of March we left for a one-week "spring" vacation. With just a temporary plywood floor in the van, we headed for north Florida in a steady rain, which lasted all night. Then into Georgia to see "the spring flowers". The dogwood was lovely but flowers there weren't! We were just too early, for soon we ran into late winter, rather than spring. Camping just north of Atlanta we found everything covered with snow one morning. The next morning it was down to 30 degrees and since we had left expecting warm weather and wildflowers we had taken only light sleeping bags which weren't nearly enough. That night we covered ourselves with extra clothing, towels and even newspapers to keep semi-warm. We returned to Florida wondering what had happened to our Spring wildflower trip!!

The latter part of April I cleaned up another of my ancient toys - my 1946 Century mahogany outboard boat with a '55 Johnson 25 H.P. motor - and entered it in an Antique and Classic Boat Show at Sanford. On Saturday we ran up the St. Johns River with all the lovely old Chris Crafts and Centurys for a picnic on an island park. I won the award for best outboard of the show. I won't say how many outboards were entered, except to note that most of the boats were rich folks' cruisers and inboard runabouts. And what beautiful old boats they were!! Bah on fiberglass and plastic!

We took a second week's trip north about the middle of May - no snow this time! I went to a camera show in Greensboro, NC then we spent several pleasant days on the Blue Ridge Parkway where, at last, we saw and photographed zillions of lovely wildflowers. Still savoring those brisk North Carolina days and nights we returned home to a blistering hot summer in Florida - the worst in memory. We spent the summer mostly hibernating in the air-conditioned house - a terrible waste of four months. Because of our two trips, Betty didn't plant her spring Mini-garden, so I do not have the usual disaster report to make. Her fall garden is now in and looking pretty good but you followers of this saga will no doubt realize that her winter harvest will probably consist of eight string beans, one squash, two tomatoes and a pod or two of peas. During the summer I did humor Betty by taking her to the usual garage sales, flea markets and antique shows, from which she acquired more assorted junk. What with my camera collection and her accumulation of glass, pottery and assorted cast-off junk, I tell friends that our house consists of one kitchen, two baths and six storerooms, one of which we sleep in.

The latter part of October we went on a two-week trip, this time with a fully converted van which worked out very well. We visited some Civil War sites in Georgia and Virginia, then made our first visit to Washington, D.C., where we walked our legs off for three days at the Smithsonian, and gawked at the usual tourist sights. Returning by way of the Outer Banks of North Carolina we visited a couple National Wildlife Refuges and Forts Monroe, Pulaski and McAllister. It was a great trip and we are ready to hit the road again somewhere after the holidays. While we are out of town we leave our chubby pussy-cat with Betty's mother in Orlando. They seem to get along well, but the "Polecat" is always happy to get back home to "her" yard, where she make the daily inspection rounds and chases the lizards around. She seems to have slowed down a bit in her mid-age years, so the lizards are enjoying a less hazardous existence.

This fall Florida has been sort of awash, with some 26 inches of rain in the past three months, and that without any hurricane! All of our local hiking trails are under water, so we can't even get out into the woods now that the cooler fall weather has arrived. Perhaps things will be back to normal after the busy holiday season is over.

And to all of you. Best wishes and Happy Holidays!



Cocoa Beach, Florida
Christmas 1973

Dear Friends:

As usually happens, the holiday season has crept up on us so quickly ~~that there is scarcely~~ time to get this letter out to you. So, if you receive it late, you might think of this as a "Happy Groundhog Day" message!

This year has passed so swiftly that we have had little time, even for reflection. For the most part, we kept our "noses to the grindstone" operating our business. We were unable to take a real spring vacation but we did manage to get away on a few week-ends early in the year for canoeing and camping trips. We had planned and looked forward to a backpacking trip on the Appalachian Trail during September. But again, because of business problems, we had to cancel those plans. Finally, during Thanksgiving week, we managed to get away on a trip to the Hatteras National Seashore. We spent most of our time there at the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge observing snow geese and whistling swans and other waterfowl. It was a very enjoyable "get away from it all" trip.

A major project which occupied all my free time for several week-ends this spring was removing and completely overhauling the engine in our VW bus. It had just about given up the ghost last December with burned valves and loose head studs, to the point where we had to stop driving it for fear it would swallow a valve or just fall apart. After many hours of work and a few skinned knuckles, I bolted it back into the bus, hooked everything up, and was pleased when it started up almost at once. We have since driven it some 12,000 miles, so the patient seems to have survived the operation!

Betty has taken up vegetable gardening with a vengeance. Her back-yard mini-garden, which amounts to about ten square feet, contains three or four tomato plants, a few green beans, radishes, some lettuce and two perverse squash plants which refuse to produce anything but leaves. The area has become the happy hunting ground for all the worms, bugs and other critturs in the neighborhood, but she has managed to harvest some salad ingredients which they rejected. Now she is maintaining a watchful vigil over her tomatoes. When they begin to turn red it will become a contest between her and our mocking birds to see who will reap the harvest. I have not computed a benefit-to-cost ratio for this project, but at least she is having fun with it. Just recently she started a herb garden. Our yard is going fast!

In general, our business, The Wilderness Shop, has done quite well this year, with sales overall running much better than last year. If December is up to our expectations, we might just manage to eke out a modest living this year. We have expanded our product lines quite a bit, adding more clothing, hiking boots, sleeping bags and accessories. We also ordered some ten speed bikes for Christmas, but so far they have not arrived. Like many of you, we are seriously concerned about next year. Fuel and material shortages will certainly pose many new problems. We are already having trouble getting some products, particularly those which use nylon. All imported items have been a severe headache all year, with shortages and constantly increasing prices. Very likely the situation will become still worse next year and it is becoming almost impossible to plan ahead realistically.

We are still keeping busy in conservation activities. In October I made a quick trip to Massachusetts to represent the Florida Audubon Society at a meeting of state Societies. We are becoming more active in the Florida Trail Association and in November I was elected a Director of the organization. Right now we are getting prepared for the annual Christmas Bird Counts at Cocoa and the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge.

And so, it is again time to wish each of you a very happy holiday season. And let us all hope that next year will not be so grim as many people are predicting.

Season's greetings,

Karl + Betty

911 Bali Road
Cocoa Beach, Florida 32931
Christmas 1976

Holiday Greetings, Relatives & Friends:

Once again Christmas is almost upon us and we are in the usual frantic rush to do a lot of last-minute things. This has been a fairly busy year for us and it is hard to believe that it is almost over! Soon we will be engaged in the local Audubon Christmas Bird Counts, which fall between Christmas and New Years Day.

Our usual canoeing activities were severely curtailed early this year because of an emergency appendectomy which Betty underwent. She recovered rapidly, however, and we were able to close the shop for a week in April to take a camping/backpacking vacation in the Sumter National Forest in South Carolina. With some friends we hiked for three days along the beautiful and wild Chattooga River, of "Deliverance" fame. This was intended to be a wild-flower trip and we weren't disappointed! Beautiful flowers were every where, many of which we had never seen before. For two days we literally walked on Trilliums which were growing right in the trail. Betty was in ecstasy!

This was our last fling before the long, hot summer, except for a couple other week-end camping trips. And was it ever a long, hot summer! Really the worst I have ever experienced since moving to Florida. We had a great deal of rain this year and the heat and humidity never let up until November arrived. It was good, though, to see the rains return after several dry years, and to have the swamps and marshes once again in a normal condition. We did help band a lot of young gulls and terns early in the summer, but then sort of hibernated behind the air conditioner for the next five months.

Our business has had its ups and downs this year, with a very disappointing summer season but a better than average fall season. The Bicentennial celebration seemed to have little or no effect on the sale of camping equipment. We had a spurt of Christmas buying the first week of December but this second week has been pretty dead. We hope for an improvement the next couple weeks, so we can pay off a stack of imposing bills! All in all, though, we are managing to survive in this poor economic situation and I suppose that is all one can ask.

In September Betty came down with her annual case of garden fever. The symptoms are first indicated when seed and plant catalogs appear mysteriously in the mailbox. This is followed by intense study and planning, digging up the soil, treating the soil to kill weeds and critturs, and, finally, planting her mini-garden. Then comes the anxious wait for the first seeds to sprout, followed by a pitched battle with worms, bugs and other assorted critturs intent on a free meal. Now she is standing watch over her tomatoes, waiting for the first one to turn red. Soon she will harvest her annual crop of a dozen or so tomatoes, eight or ten green beans, several leaves of lettuce, a half-dozen radishes, and, if fate smiles, perhaps even one small squash. However, I guess it is a harmless hobby!

In late October we took another week off to camp and hike in the Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina, including a three-day backpack trip into the Shining Rock Wilderness Area. The fall foliage was still glorious and the cool, brisk weather was a welcome change from Florida heat. It was a most enjoyable interlude.

At the annual meeting of The Florida Trail Association in November, I was elected President for the next year - an assignment which will no doubt take up all my remaining spare time. It's a good thing I don't have a mini-garden hobby! The weeds would win.

We hope, in spite of our tardiness and the poor postal service, that this greeting reaches you before Christmas. If not, have a happy Groundhog Day, anyway.

Our very best wishes,

Christmas 2002

Dear friends & relatives:

With another year nearly over, we find ourselves busy as ever, with more to do than we can accomplish. In January we visited my sister in Coral Springs and I also attended a meeting of my Antique Outboard Motor Club. In March it was a trip to the Antique Boat show in Mt. Dora where old wood inboards from the 30's, 40's and 50's were on display. That is a rich folks' hobby but I still love to look at them. In April we took a "mini" vacation with friends to NW Florida to look for migrating spring birds. There was no "drop-out" of birds but as usual the oysters and shrimp from Apalachicola Bay were delicious.

Our hot weather arrived early, in April, so about the middle of May we left on what was intended to be a relaxing two-week trip to the mountains. It was a disaster! In western Virginia, four days after we left, I came down with some sort of awful bug - sore throat, fever and an ear infection which made me almost totally deaf. Three days later Betty had it, though she didn't lose her hearing. We had only one choice - to try to get home and reach a doctor as soon as possible. I had three days to drive with a bad infection and fever, while Betty communicated with me by notes and hand signals. Somehow we made it and spent the next two or three days mostly in bed. Betty didn't recover fully till late in June and I was still under medication late in July. We both recovered OK, but never want to encounter that bug again!

During June and July we did a lot of yard work, cutting out some small trees and bushes which had volunteered in the yard. By August we were starting to get organized for a long trip out west. My WWII Bomb Group had scheduled a Reunion in Salt Lake City for the last weekend of September. Betty was looking forward to visiting the famous Mormon genealogy library, but I was a bit apprehensive about driving our van that far and back with some 210,000 miles on it. I spent most of my time for two or three weeks going over it carefully and to be safe, installed a new set of tires. I also splurged on a new digital camera to experiment with on the trip. It is my first and I still have a lot to learn about it. We planned to take a couple weeks driving out and another two weeks or so on the return trip. Before leaving I learned that one of my best friends, whom I expected to see at S.L.C., had died of a stroke. It was sad news and left just four of us to get together from our old armament group.

We left on 10 Sept. and took a northern route going through Iowa, Nebraska and Wyoming. We visited the Amana Colony where we discovered that Maytag had purchased the Amana appliance factory and even more amazing, that Maytag operated a cheese factory nearby, where we bought some wonderful blue cheese. We took a ride on a replica of Lewis & Clark's keel boat on the Missouri where my driving sunglasses got caught in a line and plopped overboard. No long afterwards trouble loomed - the engine started to emit intermittent squealing sounds. It turned out to be a bad bearing in the tensioning pulley, which I finally had to replace in Jackson, WY. That turned out to be our only van problem during the trip. We spent two unplanned days in Cody, WY where they have four wonderful museums. Then on to Yellowstone, where it was 14 degrees one morning, and Grand Teton, our favorite western National Park.

We finally reached S.L.C. on 25 Sept. where I spent most of my time with my buddies at the Reunion and Betty spent her time at the L.D.S. Family Library. It was a great Reunion but we missed our comrade, Bob. We left on our return trip on the 29th, heading for Capitol Reef N.P. where we spent a couple days. We took a southern route home via Colorado, where we took the steam excursion train from Durango to Silverton, then through Oklahoma and Louisiana and on to Florida. We stopped at Pensacola to visit the wonderful Navy Air Museum for a day - what beautifully restored old planes they have there! It was really a shock to return to the heat in Florida after being in cooler areas for over a month.

Now we are caught up in lots of fall activities with the various clubs we belong to. From 14 to 17 Nov. we volunteered to help with registration at a Wildlife Festival in Titusville. I am still volunteering at Merritt Island Refuge and Betty is always up to her clavicle in her Genealogy Society. So ends our year and this letter. We wish you all a very merry Christmas and a great New Year.

Christmas 2003

Dear friends & relatives:

Can it be? Another Christmas letter? Whenever I start to fret about getting this letter out, I remind myself how it used to be before the home computer - typing a letter, correcting errors, having copies made, hand-addressing envelopes, licking stamps, etc. Then I say, "Isn't this fun?"

We had a pretty active year starting with a January visit to my sister and family in Coral Springs plus a three day trip to Everglades Nat'l. Park where we finally saw a White-crowned Pigeon. On the first of February we shared with everyone the shuttle tragedy over Texas. It was so hard to believe, as there had never before been a problem on entry.

The cypress fence in our yard, which I built in '65, is now showing its age so I began to rebuild part of it in February. Later in the month Betty and I cleaned out and sealed the concrete lily pond in our yard before planting new lilies and other plants. That was a major chore which I hope will not have to be done again soon! We didn't put any new fish in, as a Great Blue Heron enjoyed snacks of our last stock of fish.

Spring arrived early this year - both March and April were unusually warm. In mid-March we joined some 4000 other people in celebrating the 100th anniversary of Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Betty's maternal relatives settled in upstate New York, around Rochester, where several of her cousins still live. For years she has wanted to visit that area and do genealogical research. This year I ran out of excuses for not going, so decided to humor her. We left here on 27 May and ended up in a state park on the shore of Lake Ontario, west of Rochester. It was still cold (in 40's) and rainy there and my hopes of having a few days to myself to bum around taking photos didn't work out. Instead I drove Betty around to visit relatives and spend hours in every nearby village library, doing research. I did manage to visit an old Army buddy, Chuck Fishbaugh, who lives in the area. After a final stop at the big downtown library in Rochester and a couple more cousin stops we left for Clayton to spend a day at the great antique boat museum there. They were just opening for the season and had just put one of their mahogany runabouts in the water. We were the first passengers of the year to tour a portion of the Thousand Islands area. A wonderful boat ride on a clear sunny day, for a change.

From Clayton we drove down to Cranberry Lake in the Adirondacks where I had hoped to spend a week or so camping. It was not to be - the late cold, wet weather had delayed the black fly hatch beyond the time I had expected and they really chewed us up at two campsites. I was almost ready to call it quits and head for home when Betty suggested taking a quick, unplanned visit to the Maine coast, one of our favorite places. It was a great idea - we drove up the coast as far as Acadia Nat'l. Park. We had been there twice before but in miserable fog and rain conditions. This time we had three perfect, sunny days and really enjoyed the scenery.

This fall Betty attended a national genealogy meeting in Orlando, I went to a couple of my club meetings and we volunteered at a Birding & Wildlife Festival in Titusville. We have no "mini garden" this year and weeds have thrived around the house - genealogy is transcendent. And so another year is passing. We wish you all a Merry Christmas and rewarding New Year.

Christmas 2004

Greetings from the "Land of Sky Blue Tarps":

We refer, of course, to the blue plastic tarps that have been nailed down on thousands of roofs on buildings over much of Florida to keep rain from entering through areas where tarpaper and shingles were stripped off by one or more of the four hurricanes which slammed us this fall. What a season! Everything else we did this year sort of pales in comparison.

Charlie, the strongest of the lot at Category 4, slammed into Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda on 13 August, roared across the state close to Orlando and back into the Atlantic around Daytona. It did a great deal of damage in Orlando but just sideswiped us. We had no damage other than lots of trash and debris in the yard which we spent two days cleaning up. Frances was quite another matter - it was the worst of the lot for us. Early on it was expected to come ashore near Cape Canaveral as a Category 4 storm. That got our attention!! We on the barrier beach were ordered to evacuate. Betty and I, with this advanced warning, spent nearly a week storing all loose tools, etc. inside, moving our canoe and kayaks into the garage, boarding up windows and packing both vehicles with whatever valuable and necessary things we had to save at all costs. I knew our house would not survive a direct hit by this massive storm. The day before the hurricane hit we evacuated to New Smyrna to stay with my cousin. Fortunately for us the last day or so the storm weakened to a high Category 2 and made landfall about 70 miles south of us early in the morning on 5 Sept. It was a BIG and slow moving storm. The older frame house where we stayed groaned and shuddered all night while we worried about our house.

On Monday we were allowed to return home. As we drove back through Cocoa Beach on A1A we saw tree branches and roofing material everywhere. Probably 90% of the commercial signs along the way were ripped apart or torn down. As I write this none have yet been repaired. There seemed to be no structural damage that we could see, but that was only because we could not see the massive damage to buildings on the ocean side. Even today many motels and condos are still closed for repairs. Our house was undamaged and we didn't lose even one shingle. But the yard was a terrible mess and our swimming pool was pea-green and nearly filled with leaves, branches and palm fronds. This time we spent nearly three weeks cleaning up. It was backbreaking work for us old folks (I hit 80 in June) with no help. We had no power for two days. Our local super market had to throw out all perishable foods, meats, dairy products and frozen food. What a terrible waste!

Then, when we were exhausted and nearly at the end of our rope, Hurricane Jeanne, which had been well out in the Atlantic, turned in a circle and on 25 Sept. hit Florida within five miles of where Frances hit and at almost exactly the same early morning hour. This time we did not evacuate - we had had enough and if we were to be blown away so be it! We had more cleanup to do but not nearly as bad as Frances, since most everything had already been blown down. Again we lost power for a couple days and again our supermarket had to throw out all the perishable foods which only recently had been restocked.

We didn't take a real vacation this year but in mid-October we drove out to Des Moines for a reunion of my WWII Bomb Group. It may well have been our last, as our ranks are thinning. On our return we still had yard cleanup to do. In November we volunteered at a Birding Festival in Titusville and next week we plan to take a weekend camping trip for a little relaxation.

We wish you all a very happy holiday season.

Christmas 1991

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Dear Friends and Relatives:

Where does the time go? Each year, as the first greeting cards start to arrive, it is hard to believe that another holiday season is upon us! If we had a bit of snow and ice down here, I suppose it would be easier to accept. We manage to keep pretty busy in retirement, but we never seem to have enough time - or money - to do all the things we would like.

We started off the year by joining other local Audubon members in a birding trip to the Tallahassee area the first week of January. We have always considered that general area of the state to be one of the prettiest and most interesting parts of Florida and we always enjoy seeing wintering birds there which seldom get to our part of the state. The five day trip netted us a couple life birds. As usual in late winter & early spring, we went to several antique shows and I had a dealer's table at a couple camera shows. I spent a lot of time during the first quarter cleaning, painting and otherwise fixing up my '65 Corvette in anticipation of entering it in a regional show at Cypress Gardens in January '92.

We attended the Annual Meeting of the Florida Trail Association in late February and enjoyed the usual activities and seminars. It is much more relaxing now than some years ago when I was state President and had to be responsible for all those things! Towards the end of March I took my '46 Century mahogany outboard boat, with '55 Johnson motor to an Antique and Classic Boat Show at Mt. Dora. Betty was ill with a cold and was unable to go, but I enjoyed seeing all the great old mahogany boats which were entered. Fiberglass may be tough and trouble-free but "woodies" are beautiful.

We woke up one spring morning to a flood in our utility room - our water heater had sprung a leak, so I had a nice job replacing it. Next, the basket of our Sears washer, which was only five years old, rusted through and literally flew apart, so we had to buy a new washer. Then, in August our Sears microwave oven, which had been repaired just the year before, quit again. And American manufacturers still wonder why so many folks buy Japanese products!!

In mid-April we had a short visit from my sister, Barb, brother-in-law Tom, niece Sandy and husband John, with their new offspring, Preston, enjoying a short escape from Ohio's wintry weather. We had not planned any long spring vacation, but decided to take a two-week trip up to the Smokies and vicinity before the long, hot, terrible and debilitating Florida summer. We left on my birthday, 4 June and headed for the cool mountains. We spent three days at Cade's Cove and then stopped at several other campgrounds we hadn't visited before. It was a nice trip except that in the middle of it I caught a cold and then Betty got it from me - both of us felt pretty miserable for several days. When we got home summer was here and we began our annual five-month period of existing in the confines of the air-conditioned house. Summer here is best forgotten!

Since September is the hottest month of the year here, we decided to head out west for the month. We left on 3 September and pointed our Chevy Van west. It is too bad one has to traverse so much zilch country to reach the beauties of the west! Our first stop was Mesa Verde and then on to all the National Parks in Utah - Arches, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef, Bryce and Zion. We had never been there before. What glorious vistas! It still seems a little unreal that such beautiful places exist. Thank goodness for our National Park System. There were, however, some unexpected surprises. We had assumed that September would be a slack period - after start of school, etc. No way! Everywhere it was mobbed. Campgrounds were filled at most Parks by noon and we had to adjust our schedule to match reality. Sometimes we felt we were the only English speaking people about - there were hundreds of visitors from Germany, England, France, Sweden, Japan, as well as other folks whose language I couldn't identify. They came by chartered bus and rented cars. I guess the current exchange rate is a bonanza to almost all foreigners. We stopped in Sandy, Utah for a brief visit with my niece, Lesley and her husband, Jim, then went on to Salt Lake City Airport where we met our good friend Helen Cruickshank and took her to Jackson, Wyoming, where she planned a two-week vacation in Jackson Hole N.P. After spending a couple days there we drove up to Glacier N.P. for a quick three-day visit. We had cold windy weather with snow and Betty quickly decided she liked Jackson Hole much better! We also really enjoyed a side trip to Red Rocks National Wildlife Refuge where we got another life bird and saw our first Badger. After another two or three days at Jackson Hole we reluctantly turned the van east and headed home, following for a day or so the old Oregon Trail. It was interesting to see some of the landmarks such as Independence Rock, Chimney Rock, Split Rock, Devil's Gate and Scott's Bluff, which gave the pioneers a feeling of hope and progress as they trudged their way across the great plains on the way to a new land and an uncertain future.

After returning home we had lots of work to do, cleaning up the yard and pool, servicing the van, etc. I started more work on my Corvette and Betty became involved with a tree sale sponsored by her Garden Club. To keep out of mischief I have recently been rebuilding and restoring my old 1947 7.5 HP Mercury outboard motor. Hope to have it running again by the new year. I think I mentioned in a previous Christmas letter that as soon as Betty joined the Garden Club she stopped planting her renowned Mini-garden. To my surprise, she replanted it this fall after letting it lie fallow for three years. Though I am loathe to admit it, the Mini-garden has done rather well. Lettuce and turnips have provided us with several salads and we have had several servings of green beans, and three sugar snap peas which we split, one and a half each!!

With the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor just past I am sure the next four years will bring a kaleidoscope of memories to those of us who served in the War and to others who remember that cataclysmic period. Remembering buddies we now seldom or never see, as well as those who never came home, strange and interesting places where we served, hardships and discomforts as well as triumphs, and events we would prefer to forget but never shall. Thankfully, the world is now more peaceful and we must strive to keep it that way.

Happy Holidays!